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BOB WOODWARD

LIFTING THE VEIL

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Special to The Herald

WASHINGTON — Bob Woodward wanted to be a reporter. That was his goal, plain and simple, when he marched into The Washington Post on a bright day in 1969 and asked to see the editor of the Metropolitan section. It was a bold move for a big-eyed, green-as-grass boy, especially since his resume was blank — he had no newspaper experience. But Bob Woodward, you see, has always been bold. As one colleague today puts it: "He was born that way."

Soon after hitting the Post newsroom, Woodward meets his man: section editor Harry Rosenfeld. "What can I do for you?" asks Rosenfeld.

"I want to be a newspaper reporter," says Woodward.

Rosenfeld eyes him suspiciously. "You're crazy," he says. Woodward repeats his request. Again, the editor is nonplussed. "You're crazy," he repeats.

This banter continues. Finally, Rosenfeld gives in to the young man's ambition. Woodward can work with one of the section's deputy editors. He has two weeks to prove himself.

Fourteen days later, Woodward has written 12 stories. None of them has seen print. On the last day of his stint, Rosenfeld approaches him. "How'd ya do, Woodward?" he asks, though of course, he already knows the answer.

"Well," says Woodward, "I wrote these 12 stories, but none of them was published."

Rosenfeld looks at him. "Well," he says gently, like a pro baseball player who has to tell his own son that he's lousy at the game, "that's because you're terrible. Go work someplace else."

WOODWARD / *from 1G*

Bob Woodward, as the history books will document, got the last laugh. After the disastrous dry run at The Post, Woodward went directly to The Montgomery County Sentinel in Maryland (Rosenfeld wrote him a glowing letter of recommendation). In 1971, The Post, noticing his vast improvement, asked him back. In 1972, he broke the story that would topple the Nixon administration.

In 1976, Woodward's and Carl Bernstein's story (*All the President's Men*) was turned into an Oscar-winning movie starring Robert Redford (as Bob) and Dustin Hoffman (as Carl).

That same year, the duo wrote another book documenting the end of the Nixonian age, *The Final Days*. Next came Woodward's *The Brethren*, all about the Supreme Court, in 1979, followed by 1984's controversial *Wired*, about the fall of comic John Belushi.

Monday comes the release of perhaps his biggest post-Watergate challenge: a thick, juicy tome called *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA, 1981-1987*. The book's title is a double-entendre: It's also the code name for a covert operation.

Publisher Simon and Schuster thinks the book will be a blockbuster, and with good reason — all of Woodward's books have soared to No. 1. The first printing is 600,000 copies.

CBS has deemed the book important enough to profile Woodward tonight on *60 Minutes*, with Mike Wallace leading the interrogation. Newsweek plans a cover story Monday. And politicians in Washington are breaking into a cold — if unobtrusive — sweat.

Woodward has a reputation for leaking important national secrets, consequences be damned. This book, says someone who has seen an advance copy, contains "at least 75 front-page stories" and news about "a dozen" previously secret U.S. missions. The purported result: a new explanation of the Iran-contra affair.

"Reagan administration officials are calling me up," says Washington Post editor-in-chief Benjamin Bradlee, "and saying, 'What in the hell is in that thing?' This book is going to make a big difference."

Woodward, sleuth to the end, is more evasive. "We'll see," he says, with no trace of a mischievous smile. Then, he breaks into a grin and utters a short, cloaked phrase that speaks volumes. "Who knows?"

'Go after it!'

Bob Woodward is sitting in the living room of his gray three-story Georgetown house, sipping coffee and talking about the darkness of democracy when the phone rings. "Excuse me," he says, then picks it up. Silence. Then, a torrent.

"Jesus!" he says. "Jesus Christ! Good for you! Great! Go after it!"

He hangs up. "Someone from my investigative team at work," he says. "Now, where were we?"

This conversation has unfolded in the shadow of an Alfred Hitch-

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cock movie poster, a black-and-white promotion for *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. Such irony.

Bob Woodward does know a lot — more, say his adversaries, than any other reporter in the world. People come to him. Whisper in his ear. The legend surrounding his chief Watergate source, Deep Throat, hasn't hurt.

"People tell me, 'I know you'll protect a source,' " he says. "I hear that from people all the time. But I don't operate on leaks. That denotes somebody calling me up and saying, 'Come and get it.' I'm not an office man. Not a telephone man. I get stories by going out and seeing people."

So he does. One of his more recent, controversial visits: a January sojourn to the bedside of William Casey at Georgetown Hospital, days after the CIA director had brain surgery.

Casey, the protagonist in Woodward's book, certainly had more tales to tell. Woodward was there to see if he could get them. Rumor had it that Woodward produced a fake CIA identification card to gain clearance. Woodward maintains he simply showed his press pass and walked in. Either way, an illumination of Woodward's techniques.

While Woodward's means of gathering information are often scorned, he is universally applauded for painting the big picture when no one else can.

'The jewel in our crown'

"He's the best reporter of all time," says Post columnist and close friend Richard Cohen.

"Truly remarkable, the jewel in our crown," maintains Bradlee. "I can't think of any employee who has meant more to an institution."

"A first-rate reporter who is genuinely involved in investigative journalism," says Mike Wallace. "He develops sources and brings them along quietly. He insinuates himself into your confidence. He did that with me."

And certainly with Casey, whom Woodward interviewed close to 50 times. The idea to penetrate the CIA's armor came to Woodward "right before the 1984 election. One of the issues was national security — Reagan's philosophy on covert wars, the so-called Reagan doctrine. And I thought, 'Had it made the world safer?' And with that simple question, I began my first interview."

Woodward has worked three years on *Veil*, juggling it with his job at The Post. As the newspaper's star, he is allowed time off whenever he wants to write his books. He agrees it's a sweetheart [illegible]

His finances are as secure as his career. He makes $1 million or more per book; his net worth is about $6 million. Despite the fame and fabulous wealth, he is earthbound. He drives a Honda and has assorted pieces of wicker (wicker!) furniture in his home.

"He doesn't make a big deal out of the fact that he's the boss," says Barbara Feinman, his research assistant on *Veil*. "He treated me like I was on his level. Which is overwhelming, because he's Bob Woodward."

'The nicest guy'

Everything you always wanted to know about Bob Woodward but were afraid to ask: He is a boyish 44, taut of belly and strong of jaw. His hair is receding slightly, and he plays with it a lot when engrossed in conversation. Speaking of the voice, it is low and gentle, a Midwestern-tinged monotone that cuts the air quicker than a scream.

He is twice divorced, has one daughter (10-year-old Tali from the second marriage) and is now living with fellow Post reporter Elsa Walsh. Their Lhasa apso, Pym, a present from him to her, has the run of the house.

Walsh met Woodward in 1980 when she came to work for The Post. She was 23, fresh out of Berkeley. Intimidated by Woodward's reputation? Not in the least.

"Let's just say it was a mutual attraction," says Walsh, a fresh-faced woman, now the paper's courts reporter, who looks as if she just jumped off an Esprit print ad. "I thought more about the fact, really, that he was my co-worker. I thought, 'God, this is a stupid thing to do.' But sometimes, you know, you do stupid things that have wonderful results."

Woodward and Walsh kept their relationship quiet for about two years. Finally, they gave up on secrecy and went public. He teaches her a lot about journalism and life; she gives him security and added zest. Walsh says they are very happy.

"One of Bob's friends was staying at our house recently, and he looked at us and said, 'I feel like I'm a guest on the Doris Day show.' It's a symbiotic relationship. We're real strong when we're together, and real strong when we're apart. Bob is just, oh, I don't know, real understanding."

Bob Woodward is also (A) shy, (B) loyal, (C) a mass murderer. Answer: A and B.

"He's just the nicest guy you ever could imagine," Cohen says. "And I know that makes it difficult, because it's easier to write [illegible]"

Other friends have similar praise. Bob Woodward, they say, has three priorities, in this order: family, friends, career. He has missed days of work, compromised his schedule, done the unbelievable for a friend in need.

Feinman tells a story about Woodward's generosity. She had a cat in need of medical care after being hit by a car. Woodward offered to pay the expenses. Feinman declined the offer. Woodward kept coming at her. "Think of it as a loan from my daughter, who loves animals," he told her.

Woodward is also uncompromisingly normal. Unlike Bernstein, he doesn't date the likes of Elizabeth Taylor or hang out at Elaine's. Fun for him is his stereo equipment and the morning read of four newspapers: The Post, The Washington Times, The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times. He abhors celebrity. But items about him are leaked to Washington publications regularly

"Every month," he says flatly "But I just expect that. Nobody likes having somebody gossiping about them, but you can't practice this profession and not realize that all good stories, in a sense, start with gossip. You know, like, 'McFarland left on a secret mission, he's just not home enough.' You follow that up, and it could lead to the Iran-contra answer."

A dignified guy

Sources at The Post say Woodward's relentless pursuit of low-keyed normalcy almost kept *All the President's Men* from being filmed. "Bob was very concerned that if he and Carl sold the book, and it went Hollywood, the story would be trivialized. He was terrified of that happening," one says.

Bradlee says he is time and again proud and amazed that Woodward keeps his quiet dignity intact.

"When Watergate had just happened, there was so much attention given to him. That kind of thing had never happened to a journalist before. But Bob, well, he was just terrific. He came in here every day — every day — and worked real hard. That, and he kept his head on his shoulders."

Does that attitude continue to this day?

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"You're goddamn right it does," says Bradlee.

'No one is infallible'

Despite the reputation that precedes him, Woodward is not picture-perfect. To his credit, he is the first to admit this. It bothers him that he has achieved sainthood status in the nation's journalism schools.

"I hope they're more skeptical than that," he says with a dash of humility. "I mean, look, I was onto the contra angle, but I didn't break that story. Someone else did. No one is infallible."

Others agree with Woodward. They say he does make mistakes, but they are not quick to sling mud. Many — like Cohen, who simply says, "Well, Bob's no saint" — speak in generic terms. Woodward is a nice guy. And to risk offending a nice guy — one with a considerable degree of power — is not wise.

Most everyone agrees Woodward's career does have an Achilles heel. Her name: Janet Cooke, a reporter under Woodward when he was The Post's Metro editor.

Cooke's lapse in ethics is legend. In 1981, she wrote a gripping, brutal account of a Washington child's addiction to heroin. The piece, called *Jimmy's World*, was so gripping that it won the Pulitzer Prize. Two weeks later, The Post was forced to return the award when editors learned that Cooke's "world" was fiction, not fact. The blow hit Woodward hard. "He was shaken up," recalls Bradlee.

Woodward, so long a hero, made his first big public mistake by not catching Cooke in her web of lies. "How could this get through?" many Post reporters asked.

To cope with the growing hostility, Woodward called a meeting at his house. Any reporter with questions about him or the handling of the affair should attend. It was a full house.

"He sat there for two hours, taking some of the most brutal, hard questions," remembers Cohen, who attended the meeting. "Insulting questions. From everybody, people I had never even heard of . . . from copy aides! If that would have been me up there, I wouldn't have gotten out of bed for a week."

Though the storm passed and Bradlee moved Woodward into his current, investigative-team leader position, some newsroom hostilities remain. Woodward's line of thinking so influences The Post's investigative work, say some reporters, that readers don't get the whole story.

"He wants every reporter to be like him," says one Post reporter who has worked under Woodward. "The 'Holy shit!' stories — the ones that people will read and then say, you know, 'Oh, God!' — those are the only ones he really cares about. He's not for the bread-and-butter stories. And reporters who can't produce those loud, attention-getting pieces, well, they are just devalued."

Loretta Tofani, a Pulitzer-Prize winner who left The Post for The Philadelphia Inquirer this year because she disagreed with Woodward and The Post's stance on investigative journalism, said she liked Woodward — thought he was a "genial, gentlemanly guy."

"But under Woodward," she continued, "there are two types of investigative reporting. There is Woodward's type, the quick-hit, wrongdoing-of-government-officials story, and the sociological type, the series on teen-age pregnancy or schools. The problem there is that they never consider another type of work — that which shows how people can get hurt by bad government policies and systems. Woodward and The Post don't seem to be concerned about stories that show this effect on people."

Tofani said she is not the first reporter who has left The Post because of butting heads with Woodward and his journalistic interests.

Although he denies it, Woodward's quiet charm and dazzling aura win him both friends and enemies.

Lynn Hirschberg, who wrote an in-depth profile on Woodward and his book *Wired* for Rolling Stone magazine in 1983, remembers being bowled over by Woodward when she first interviewed him.

"Meeting him was the most overwhelming thing in my life," says Hirschberg, who was 28 at the time. "If you grew up around the time that Watergate was happening, you'll understand. Bob was my hero."

Hirschberg's loyalty and liking for Woodward eventually catapulted her into a painful situation. Her article, which illuminated the drug climate of Hollywood in a very unflattering light, was changed dramatically in the editing process by Hirschberg's boss, Rolling Stone editor Jann Wenner. Wenner allowed one of Hirschberg's sources — Judy Jacklin Belushi, John's widow — to rewrite her quotes.

Hirschberg, devastated by what was going on, turned to Woodward. She talked to him on the telephone several times, telling her story while digesting his advice.

What she didn't know is that Woodward, behind her back, was taking notes on their conversations. He later used some of the information — and quoted her directly — in a letter he wrote protesting the Rolling Stone piece. The letter was circulated to, among others, Wenner.

"So you could just imagine . . . ," says Hirschberg.

Hirschberg says she believes Woodward's fame is a perfume that attracts people to him. She said it worked especially well for Woodward when he was interviewing Judy Jacklin Belushi. Says Hirschberg: "She thought Robert Redford was coming to call."

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Bibliography

■ **1974:** ***All the President's Men,*** with Carl Bernstein, the end-all book about the fall of Richard Nixon. Made into Oscar-winning 1976 film, starring Robert Woodward and Dustin Hoffman. Jason Robards, who portrayed Post editor-in-chief Ben Bradlee, won the Best Supporting Actor Oscar for his portrayal. The book sold 600,000 copies.


Woodward

■ **1976:** ***The Final Days,*** with Carl Bernstein, which documented in painful, glaring detail the last days of the Nixon regime. Made into an ABC miniseries, to air this fall. Gossip columnist Liz Smith got an advance look at this book and spilled some facts. Woodward was not amused. Enraged, more like it. The book sold 900,000 copies.

■ **1979:** ***The Brethren,*** with Scott Armstrong, an amazingly detailed account of our country's highest court. Woodward's most cerebral book to date, it sold 900,000 copies.

■ **1984:** *Wired.* Popular but controversial look at the life and fast (read druggy) times of comic John Belushi. In the process of being made into a film, though Woodward is doubtful about its acceptance. "People in Hollywood," he says, "don't like to have that mirror turned toward them." The book sold 600,000 copies.